

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“Horns, Magic and Mist”

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Logline

While traveling through Britannia, Xena, Gabrielle and Darion accidentally stumble upon a strange, mystical island and when they find out that there is trouble there, they are asked to come to the aid of the people that inhabit the enchanted place for someone unknown is threatening the island's very existence.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Daylight. A busy town street, bustling with people. Argo and Gabrielle's horse are tied up next to a building with a sign over the entryway that says 'Simon's Souvenir Shop' in old English lettering.

CUT TO

Inside the shop. The camera pans over rows of shelves, reaching up to the ceiling on one long wall of the room, with all kinds of toys and knickknacks. There are necklaces of blue, green, gold and red glass beads hanging from wooden racks; there are painted wooden figurines of soldiers in a fighting stance, or battling each other, or riding horses that rear up with their hooves in the air. There are also figurines of dragons in various poses.

A pair of child's hands reaches for one of the dragons, one that has large wings extending from its body and fire coming out of its mouth. The camera pulls back to show that the hands belong to Darion. He picks up the dragon and turns, showing it to Gabrielle and Xena who are standing nearby.

DARION:

Can I get this one? It looks just like the one you told me about on Elis!

XENA (chuckles):

That one had three heads.

DARION (scrunches up his face):

Okay...but other than that, it's exactly like it, right?

XENA (shrugs):

I guess so.

DARION (eagerly):

Can I have it? (to Gabrielle) I really, really like this dragon. Look how the flames just explode from his mouth! (shows her the dragon and points to the flames) It's so cool! I promise, it's the last time I'm asking for anything...well, at least here in Britannia.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

I don't know, sweetie...they're a little pricey.

DARION (makes a puppy-dog face):

Please?

Gabrielle sighs again and looks at Xena who shrugs.

XENA:

Hey, don't look at me. I'm not getting in the middle of this one.

Gabrielle looks back at Darion.

GABRIELLE:

All right. (smiles) It's not like we buy a whole lot of things, anyway. (quick pan to Xena, who rolls her eyes and smirks)

CUT TO

Outside the shop. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion stand next to the horses.

GABRIELLE (reaches for the dragon which Darion is holding):

We'll just put that in with your other presents for now, okay? (Darion pouts) Come on, if you take it to the tavern you'll just get food all over it.

Darion sighs dramatically and hands over the dragon; Gabrielle puts it into a rather large cloth bag attached to her saddle.

XENA (grins):

Well, if there's nothing else we manage to do here in Britannia, at least we'll help keep the souvenir shops in business.

GABRIELLE (smiles brightly):

Okay, everyone--time to eat!

They start to walk toward a tavern down the street.

DARION:

You know what I want? A candied apple!

GABRIELLE:

That's not exactly dinner, is it, Darion? How about we save the sweets for later, huh?

DARION:

Okay. Then I'll have...a turkey leg.

GABRIELLE:

That sounds good. (pats him on the shoulder) Maybe I'll have one myself.

DARION:

So...are we going to be here in Britannia much longer?

XENA:

We've still got some ground to cover.

GABRIELLE:

So far, we haven't seen any sign of the Romans. (she stares into the distance, a suddenly thoughtful look on her face)

XENA (glances at her):

Are you all right being back here, Gabrielle?

DARION (looks up curiously):

Why wouldn't Gabrielle be all right?

GABRIELLE (gives him a quick look, then looks defensively at Xena):

Of course I'm all right. (sighs a little) We were here a while ago, Darion, and we had a...pretty rough time. (changes the subject with a forced smile) I think we should head north--while we're here, I want to see that famous forest in Brigantes.

DARION:

Why is it famous?

GABRIELLE:

I've heard it's one of the world's most amazing forests, with beautiful trees... (Xena snorts; Gabrielle looks over at her and smiles teasingly) Of course, some of us think that if you've seen one tree, you've seen them all...

XENA (chuckles, slightly piqued):

And some of us think a tree is something to talk to. (shakes her head) All right, we'll go see your forest.

The camera pulls back as their voices start to fade.

DARION (mischievously):

So you pretty much go along with whatever Gabrielle wants, huh?

XENA (unflappable):

Not true. It's just that keeping her happy is the smart thing to do.

CUT TO

A lush green forest. The trees stretch high into the sky forming a thick canopy, allowing minimal light to shine through to the forest floor, with scattered patches of sunlight. A thin blue mist hangs in the air. The camera slowly moves through the forest, lingering on the morning dew that drips off of the leaves and flowers, the birds perched on branches, the squirrels racing about through the upper branches of the trees. The air is filled with birdsong and the buzz of insects.

The camera moves in on a clearing with thick rose bushes growing along its edges, the delicate red, pink, white and pale yellow blossoms guarded by prickly thorns. As the camera moves further, we see that the clearing is actually a grassy beach, water lapping peacefully at its edges. A veil of white mist, tinted pale blue, rises just off the water's edge.

The silence is suddenly disturbed by the faint sound of pounding hooves, and then a distant neigh. The pounding grows louder until the legs of a galloping white horse come into view; it is pure white with hooves of polished gold. The animal continues to race toward the camera as it pulls back, showing its snow-white chest, then its neck and finally its muzzle as it neighs in fright. The camera rises higher to show the terrified look in the animal's dark eyes.

Pan to two men on horseback pursuing the white horse, carrying ropes. One is a stocky, burly middle-aged redhead with a shaggy beard; the other is tall with dirty blond hair. They laugh loudly as one of them swings the ropes forward, lassoing the animal around the neck. The white horse falls to the ground with a thud and a loud neigh, thrashing about. Laughing again, the men dismount and rush over to inspect their catch.

HUNTER #1 (the redhead):

We got it.

He draws a long sword and flips it in his hand, hilt forward, then brings down the hilt. The horse neighs again; then the sound of a blow is heard and the neighing stops abruptly.

Off-camera, a woman's voice gives a faint cry or gasp. The camera pans over to a beautiful young woman with ebony-black hair and green eyes, wearing an elegant green and white dress, who stands behind the men. She covers her mouth with her hands in dismay.

Pan back to the limp body of the white horse and the two men standing over it. We do not see what Man #1 is doing but we hear a sound, rather like that of something being sawed. The camera moves up just as the man raises his hand. He is holding up a spiral horn of gold, the same tint as the animal's hooves. Close-up of the man's grinning face.

HUNTER #2 (also grinning):

It looks like we just earned ourselves a nice bonus from the king.

The men's laughter is heard as the camera focuses on the horn, its tip sparkling in the sun. Then it pans over the immobile body of the white horse and over to the young woman who stands behind the men, her face full of sadness and guilt, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

A wide shot of a stone castle sitting on the top of a lush green hillside, a town surrounding the bottom of the hill.

CUT TO

The doors of a room fly open and the two men from the forest strut in, proudly carrying a brown bag tied at the top. Man #1 opens the bag and pulls out the golden horn.

HUNTER #1:

We got it, King Meliadus. Just as you asked.

The camera pulls back to show a man in dark robes sitting in a throne on a low pedestal, across from where the two men are standing. The throne is hewn of grey stone, with carvings of gods, heroes, and monsters, and covered with a bearskin.

The two hunters approach the throne, and Hunter #1 hands the horn to the king. A close-up of the king's hands, adorned with many rings of gold and silver, as he takes the horn and runs his hands over it. The camera pulls back to show Meliadus' face. He is a rather handsome middle-aged man, bearded, with medium-length wavy dark brown hair that is only starting to show traces of silvery gray. He looks at the men.

MELIADUS:

Excellent. But only one? Did you only see one beast?

HUNTER #2:

As a matter of fact, my lord, there were more. We only pursued one of the creatures but we saw others among the bushes and trees.

HUNTER #1:

Probably at least ten.

MELIADUS:

And it didn't occur to you to get the horns from them as well?

HUNTER #2 (hesitantly):

My lord...Princess Isabella insisted that we only bring back one.

HUNTER #1 (nervously):

As a sample.

HUNTER #2:

Yes, that's exactly it. She said that you had to look at it first, and then if it met with your approval we would go back for more. (he stammers as the king glares at him angrily) Sh-she was--very persuasive.

MELIADUS (sighs):

I bet she was. (to Hunter #1) Tell me, Oswald, was she reluctant to help you to hunt down the creature?

OSWALD (hesitantly):

She was, my lord. There were several times before we reached the creatures' grazing grounds when she wanted to go back instead of going on into the forest.

MELIADUS:

I thought she might. (sighs) I'll have to have a talk with her about it. Tomorrow, you will head out for another hunt. Take two more men with you. This time, capture every creature you see. (waves his hand toward the men) For now, you may leave.

The men exchange uncertain looks.

HUNTER #2:

Wh-what about our reward, my lord?

MELIADUS:

Reward?

OSWALD:

My lord...you said there would be a reward--ten shillings for each horn that was brought back from the hunt.

MELIADUS (sarcastic):

Oh, that's right--I did. Well, I'm taking out one shilling for each creature you missed. On your way. (off their crestfallen look) Go on to the kitchen--you'll each get a fine steak and a glass of mead. And don't disappoint me tomorrow.

Both men bow and head toward the door.

HUNTER #2 (mutters to Oswald, grumbling):

You had to tell him we saw ten more of them, you dolt!

OSWALD (in a similarly low voice):

You're the one who had to open your big mouth and say we saw more of them!

The camera zooms in once again on Meliadus as he turns the golden horn over in his hands, grinning.

CUT TO

A bedchamber, modestly but beautifully decorated. While candles are placed in nooks in the stone walls, a bouquet of freshly cut roses in a vase sits on a nightstand near a large oak bed with a white canopy and sheer white curtains. The young woman we saw in the forest stands in front of an ornate, polished wooden dresser across from the bed. She is slowly brushing her long black hair and staring almost absent-mindedly into a mirror.

There is a knock on a door and the young woman breaks out of her thoughts.

WOMAN:

Come in.

As the woman continues to brush her hair and stare into the mirror, we hear a door open off camera. Then Meliadus comes in, his image reflected in the mirror as he walks toward the young woman.

MELIADUS:

Isabella.

ISABELLA (continues to brush her hair without turning):

Father.

MELIADUS:

My men tell me that you were reluctant to help them capture the unicorn--and you only let them take one.

Isabella hesitates and looks down, slowly nodding.

ISABELLA:

It's true. (she pauses for a moment, then sets the brush down and turns to Meliadus, a pleading look on her face) Father...I really don't want to be a part of this. I don't want to help you kill them. It isn't right.

MELIADUS (puts his hands on her shoulder):

Isabella. If we can get these horns, do you understand what it means for this kingdom and for people everywhere? (Isabella looks away) They can cure so many illnesses. They can purify unclean water. They hold the antidote to nearly every poison known to man. Think of all the deaths and miseries they can prevent. With these horns, we will save the land. Don't you understand? Don't you want to help all the people who are suffering?

ISABELLA:

Oh, Father, of course I understand! Don't you think I don't feel this guilt choking me every time I see a sick child on the street, or a man brought back from battle with half his side turned black from a poisoned arrow? How can anyone turn their face and their heart from such suffering? (sighs) But, when I think of raising my hand to call the creatures of the forest, running wild, knowing nothing of our sorrow... Calling them to slaughter. That breaks my heart, too. How can we destroy such innocence, such beauty?

MELIADUS:

What does beauty have to do with it? Do you think that a cow or sheep is more deserving of death, because we don't see their beauty? (Isabella looks ashamed). Need is a harsh mistress, child. We are but human, we must kill beasts for our food, and clothing, and shelter. None of them deserve

death, that is true. But the people who starve for lack of meat or freeze for lack of tallow to burn or hides to wear, or perish from illness--do they deserve death? It is never easy, to allow the death of another. But sometimes there is no other way, Isabella. You will rule this city one day, and when the time comes for me to go, I want to go in peace. I want to know that you will be strong enough to make these choices for our people.

ISABELLA:

Don't talk of that! You are not old, you will rule for years to come! (they embrace) I'm sorry I make it so hard for you, Father. It's just that these unicorns... They have always been special to me.

MELIADUS:

And you to them. You are the only one who can call these creatures--lure them toward our hunters. You know they will answer to no one else.

ISABELLA (anguished):

But that's just it! They trust me not to harm them, they come to the sound of my voice thinking I am a friend, because I call them as friends... And then they are betrayed, even to their death. Don't you see how it shames me?

MELIADUS:

Not that again! Isabella, we have been through this time and time again! You know this is right. It is for the good of the people.

ISABELLA (getting angry too):

Is it? Is it really? I heard you talking to your counselors about the unicorn hunt. Selling those horns is going to make you quite a profit.

MELIADUS:

You were eavesdropping?! My own daughter, a spy--for shame!

ISABELLA (lowers her eyes):

Not on purpose. I came to the throne room looking for you and I heard your conversation. All you were thinking about was how much money the trade in the horns could bring into the treasury. And how you could become the most powerful of all the kings in Britannia by offering to share the horns with those kingdoms that would bend to your will.

MELIADUS (barely suppressing his rage):

So you would have us live in disease *and* poverty? Gods! Some queen you will make. This is what I have come to, this is to be the comfort of my old age: to watch my daughter bring my people to ruin for the sake of a few horses!

ISABELLA (trembling with guilt and anger):

I wish you'd realize that life is not about greed and power. It seems these days that's all you think about!

In a burst of rage, Meliadus slaps Isabella across the face. She flinches but does not turn away.

MELIADUS:

How dare you talk to me like that! I am your father!

ISABELLA:

You're not my real father.

MELIADUS (softly):

That is true. Your parents died of the plague, in a house boarded up as warning to the neighbors, with red paint on the door so that none may enter and fall ill with them. Would it comfort them much, do you think, to know their only daughter would not raise her hand to help others in pain?

ISABELLA (looks down, in a whisper):

I don't know.

MELIADUS:

And what about my men who saw you wandering alone in the forest, with no home nor family, and brought you to me? Is this how you would repay their kindness, with your obstinacy?

Isabella looks up at him. She has tears in her eyes.

ISABELLA:

I don't know that, either. I don't remember them. (she sighs) I barely even remember my real parents. (she touches a pendant on her neck) This is the only thing I have left of them. It was so long ago.

MELIADUS:

Yes; more than fifteen years now. And ever since, I've cared for you as if you were my own daughter. (he sighs and puts his hand on her cheek, stroking her face; she looks down again) I've never asked anything of you before, Isabella. But I do now. I need your help, my daughter. As do our people.

Isabella hesitates and steps back from him. Her face expresses a complex mix of emotions--gratitude, affection, sadness, anger.

ISABELLA (softly):

I know you're right, Father. I shouldn't disobey you. You've done so much for me and I should be forever grateful to you for that.

Meliadus smiles and moves toward her, taking her hands.

MELIADUS:

There, that's more like it! I knew you would come to see it my way.

Isabella's face turns cold again; then, she turns around and walks toward the window, looking out over the town and the countryside below, at the rolling green hills and the ocean to the west.

ISABELLA:

I may have agreed to do your bidding, Father, but I don't see it your way. The unicorns will always be special to me, and I won't stop grieving for them.

MELIADUS:

Grieve if you must. Just don't let it get in the way of your duty.

Isabella nods slowly. Meliadus watches her for a moment, then leaves the chamber without another word. Pan to Isabella, still standing at the window. The camera zooms in on her face, full of regret.

DISSOLVE TO

A dense, lush green forest, thin blue mist hanging in the air. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are traveling along a path at a slow trot, Xena riding ahead, Gabrielle and Darion behind. Gabrielle looks around her, enchanted by the beauty of the forest.

GABRIELLE:

Darion, look!

The camera pans in the direction where she is pointing and zooms in on a hanging branch with silvery beads of dewdrops on it, in which a ray of sunlight is refracted.

GABRIELLE:

Isn't that beautiful?

DARION (uncertainly):

It's...it's a branch.

GABRIELLE (sighs, then chuckles):

Maybe you should try riding with Xena. You two have no appreciation for the beauty of nature. Just look at how beautiful and peaceful everything is. (dreamily) Perfect harmony.

There is a loud slap; the camera pans to Xena who opens her palm ruefully.

XENA:

It's just a mosquito.

GABRIELLE:

Okay, not quite perfect. But-- (sighs blissfully) --near enough!

Xena and Darion exchange a grin, then look abashed at Gabrielle's accusing look. She rolls her eyes and nudges her horse forward.

CUT TO

A large clearing in the forest with a sparkling lake surrounded by shrubbery and flowers of many colors. Neighing and the pounding of hooves is heard, and three unicorns come into view, galloping at a desperate speed trying to evade their pursuers. The air is filled with the terrified neighing of the unicorns and the rough cries of Oswald and three other men, who are pursuing the unicorns on horseback. Zoom in on a lasso flying through the air and then wrapping around the neck of one of the unicorns, bringing it down. An arrow whizzes through the air, striking another unicorn in the side. It rears up and neighs in terror and pain.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, and Darion riding through the forest.

DARION (after a brief pause):

Gabrielle? I'm bored. Can we play our guessing game?

GABRIELLE:

Hmm... Sure.

Gabrielle looks around for a moment and her eyes land on a tree ahead of them with a large, intricate spider web, beads of dew on it.

GABRIELLE:

All right. Start guessing.

DARION:

Okay. (Darion looks around; the camera focuses on a large round stone by the side of the path) Is it round?

GABRIELLE:

Yeah, actually it is.

DARION (points to the rock):

Is it that rock?

GABRIELLE:

Nope. Try again.

DARION (to himself):

It's round... (he looks around again; zoom on a bird's nest in a tree) Is it--made of twigs?

GABRIELLE:

Nope.

DARION (looks at a cluster of berries):

Does it grow on a tree?

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

Nope.

DARION:

Gabrielle, give me a hint.

GABRIELLE:

Okay. It's made by a tiny forest creature.

DARION (vexed):

Oh--like that's gonna help. Lots of things are made by tiny forest creatures... (starts pointing around) That nest--that burrow--that... (he sees the spider web and his face lights up) ...spider web. (looks at Gabrielle) Is it a spider web?

GABRIELLE (smiles):

Yep. You got it.

DARION (pumps his fist in the air):

Yay! Okay, it's my turn. And I'll make it really hard to guess.

GABRIELLE (smiles affectionately):

Go ahead.

Darion looks around, then smiles to himself.

DARION:

Okay. Start guessing.

GABRIELLE:

Hmm... (she looks around; the camera zooms in on a squirrel sitting on a tree branch, cleaning itself) Is it a living thing?

DARION:

No.

Zoom in on a large log by the side of the path.

GABRIELLE:

Is it wood?

DARION:

Nope. (mischievously) I can give you a hint: it's round.

GABRIELLE (thinks a moment, then sighs):

All right, I give up. What is it?

DARION:

There. (he points forward, to Xena)

GABRIELLE:

What? Xena? But you said--

DARION (almost bursts out laughing):

No, it's not Xena. And it's not Argo, either.

GABRIELLE (thinks):

Round... (zoom in on the chakram swinging on Xena's side) The chakram?

DARION (grins):

Yeah! (suddenly worried) It was okay for me to pick the chakram, right? I mean, it's something I saw on our way. It counts, doesn't it?

GABRIELLE:

Of course it does, sweetie. It's just that I would have never guessed it--I was looking at all the things around us in the forest.

DARION (pleased):

That's why I picked it! I knew you'd be stumped.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

I was. I guess when you see something every day, you don't really think about it. (suddenly looks pensive)

DARION:

Hey, let's do this again! Now you think of something!

Gabrielle smiles at Darion and then looks ahead. The camera pans over to a bush covered with berries, then back to Gabrielle, who is frowning in puzzlement. The camera pans slowly back to the bush and we see that the flowers and many of the leaves have shriveled.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, look at this.

Xena turns around abruptly, reaching for the chakram, and rides up to Gabrielle.

XENA:

What?

GABRIELLE (points to the bush):

It's dying.

XENA (rolls her eyes):

That's what you wanted me to look at? Gabrielle, I may have many skills but gardening isn't one of them.

DISSOLVE TO

Another part of the forest. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are still riding. Xena looks ahead of her, staring intently; then she pulls out a parchment with a map and looks at it. Meanwhile Gabrielle looks around, puzzled and somewhat alarmed. The camera pans over a tree; some of its branches are dying, the wood drying up and the leaves withering.

GABRIELLE:

Here's another one.

XENA (still stares at the map, without looking back):

Another what?

GABRIELLE:

A tree that seems to be dying. Something is happening in this forest.

XENA (stops and turns around):

I'll tell you one thing that's happening in this forest. I'm not sure we're going in the right direction.

GABRIELLE:

How can that be? We have a map.

XENA:

Well, according to this map we should have been out of the forest by now and approaching this town, Eborac. (points to the map) But it's nowhere in sight.

GABRIELLE:

Let me see that.

She takes the map from Xena and looks at it, studying it carefully.

GABRIELLE:

You're right. We're way past this lake--we should be out of the woods already. You think we took a wrong turn somewhere?

XENA:

Maybe. (rolls her eyes) I knew we shouldn't have gotten that map. Much better to trust your instincts than some fancy piece of parchment with trees, lakes and rivers scribbled on it.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

So...what are your instincts telling you now?

XENA (sighs):

We can try and trace our way back to the lake.

CUT TO

Another part of the forest. It is turning darker. Darion is slumped against the horse's neck, dozing off.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, I think we're going in circles. I swear I've seen that tree (points at a large moss covered oak) three times already.

XENA (wryly):

Leave it to you to recognize a tree.

Darion stirs and sits up.

DARION (rubbing his eyes sleepily):

Are we there yet?

XENA (chuckles):

Depends on where "there" is.

DARION (looks around):

We're still in the forest? What's going on?

XENA:

I hate to say this but, I think we're lost.

DARION (puzzled):

Really? I didn't think you could get lost.

Gabrielle chuckles and Xena gives her a rather displeased look.

XENA:

Well, there's a first time for everything.

DARION:

Can we stop and get some rest?

XENA (looks up at the darkening sky, then sighs):

Sure. It's getting pretty late in the day. Let's make camp and we'll figure out what to do in the morning.

CUT TO

The clearing with the lake, the same one where we saw the unicorns being hunted before. It's dusk. Xena and Gabrielle are clearing an area of the ground to spread out their bedrolls.

GABRIELLE:

Look at all those twigs. There's enough of them to weave a dozen decorative baskets.

XENA (grins as she spreads out her bedroll):

Why don't you do that, Gabrielle. We could sell them to a crafts shop once we get to Eborac.

GABRIELLE:

If we get to Eborac.

XENA:

We'll get there. (smirks) Don't you have any confidence in my sense of direction?

GABRIELLE:

I used to, before we circled the same oak tree three times. (off Xena's glare) What? Can't you take a joke?

XENA (with a smirk):

Maybe the problem is, I can't tell if you're joking.

Gabrielle shakes her head, then straightens up.

GABRIELLE:

Darion, we're all ready for bedtime! (getting no response, she looks around) Darion? (she's obviously getting worried, and Xena looks up anxiously as well. Gabrielle raises her voice) Darion?!

DARION (screams off-camera, sounding terrified):

Gabrielle! Xena! Come here!

Close-up on Gabrielle's frightened face. She takes off running in the direction of Darion's voice as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Xena and Gabrielle run across the dusky clearing.

GABRIELLE:

Where are you?

DARION (still off-camera):

Over here!

The camera pans over to Darion, who is standing close to the edge of the woods, making frantic gestures.

Gabrielle catches up to him and pauses, breathless.

GABRIELLE:

What are you doing? I told you to stay close.

XENA (comes up behind Gabrielle):

What's wrong, Darion?

DARION (stammers in fright):

I just wanted to look around... Look at this!

He points down. As Xena and Gabrielle look down, the camera pans over to show the dead bodies of three unicorns.

GABRIELLE (anguished):

Oh, Darion--

DARION:

Somebody killed those horses...look, this one has an arrow sticking out of his side!

Gabrielle hugs him, pressing him close to her and patting his head. He wraps his arms tightly around her waist, clinging to her.

GABRIELLE:

It's all right, sweetie.

DARION (sniffles):

What if the people who did it are still around?

GABRIELLE:

Don't worry, Darion. You know we won't let anyone hurt you.

Pan to Xena, who is squatting next to the dead unicorns, examining the bodies. Gabrielle lets go of Darion and comes up to the bodies.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

Who would want to do such a thing? (sighs) You know, we travel all over the world seeing people being cruel to each other...but it just breaks my heart to see people being so cruel to an animal. Maybe it's because animals have no choice in their fate...they're so defenseless against humans...

XENA (looks up):

These aren't ordinary horses, Gabrielle. Look.

Gabrielle squats next to Xena.

GABRIELLE (looks down, puzzled):
Gilded hooves?

XENA:
I don't think they're gilded... I think they're golden. And look at this on their foreheads.

GABRIELLE:
It's almost like each of them had a single horn that was cut off. (stands up, thoughtfully) I wonder...

XENA (looks up at her):
About what?

GABRIELLE:
I've heard stories about a magical animal that lives in Britannia called a unicorn. I always thought it was a fairy-tale but maybe they really do exist...

XENA (gets up):
Why would anyone want to kill them?

GABRIELLE:
I have no idea.

Xena looks down and suddenly bends to pick up something lying in the grass. She examines the object.

XENA:
It's a pendant. Maybe it has something to do with whoever killed these animals...

GABRIELLE (sighs):
Xena, it's not like anyone is going to investigate this. (looks over at Darion, who stands a few feet away, obviously nervous) We'd better find ourselves another place to camp out.

CUT TO

The next day. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are riding through the forest again. The camera pans over more dying leaves and branches and wilted flowers.

XENA:
You're right, Gabrielle. Something is happening to this forest.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion ride out on the grassy beach we saw in the teaser. The camera pans over the rose bushes on the edge of the clearing; many of the roses have wilted. Pan over to the water's edge. The mist that hangs over the water has partly cleared, and through the patches of fog we see a green island not far from the shore.

GABRIELLE:
Xena, look!

XENA:

An island...that's strange. (she reaches into her saddlebag and pulls out the map again) It's definitely not on the map.

DARION (excited):

I want to see the island! Come on, Gabrielle, let's go!

He kicks the horse in the sides and slaps it lightly with the reins, making it go forward.

Xena smiles, with a bit of exasperation but indulgently, and rides ahead. The horses trot ahead through the shallow water that rises only to their chests.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion come out on the shore of the island. The shore is overgrown with luscious greenery, including apple and orange trees heavy with fruit. A green hillside is visible ahead.

DARION:

Wow, look at those apples--they're huge! Let's get some!

GABRIELLE (doubtfully):

I don't know, Darion...I have a strange feeling about this place. I'm not sure we should eat anything here.

XENA (gives her a wary look):

You think they're poisoned?

GABRIELLE (smiles thinly):

Or maybe enchanted...who knows. You think anyone lives here?

DARION (gasps):

Look!

He points to the hill, whose top is visible over the trees.

GABRIELLE:

Why don't we go up the hill and see?

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion start riding up the hill. Two figures in silvery garb stand at the top of the hill. After a while, they turn and disappear over the hillside.

XENA:

Let's check it out.

They ride ahead.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion stand at the top of the hill that dips down into a valley surrounded by a circle of hills. The valley is a lush, grassy green, rich in trees. Green huts are visible below, and one can see people walking about. Also visible from the distance are the two figures in silver who were

seen on the hill before. They stand still in the middle of a circular open space among the huts, as if waiting for Xena and Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (visibly moved):
It's...beautiful.

XENA (puzzled and wary):
It's odd. It looks like they're waiting for us. (pauses) Come on, Gabrielle. Let's go check it out...but we'd better be on our guard.

They start their descent down the hillside.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion ride into the village below. The log cabins overgrown with vines, leaves and moss have an odd look, as if they were not built by human hands but grow out of the soil like trees. The people's clothes, mostly green, seem to be woven from leaves and flowers. The people stop and stare curiously at the new arrivals.

GABRIELLE (looks around):
What a strange place... It must have taken some extraordinary skills to make these houses and these clothes.

The camera pans over to the man and the woman standing in the center of the square. They are both elderly, with long snow-white hair (the man also has a white beard), wearing shimmering silvery capes. They are both holding wooden staffs, crooked and twisted. The woman's staff has a bird head carved at the top; the man's, the head of a growling cat, its mouth open wide showing its teeth.

OLD MAN (nods solemnly):
Greetings.

OLD WOMAN:
Welcome to Avalon.

XENA (slowly):
Hello. (she dismounts and approaches them; Gabrielle and Darion follow suit) Avalon. I have never heard of this place.

OLD WOMAN:
Tell me--how did you get here?

Gabrielle dismounts and helps Darion off his horse.

GABRIELLE (puzzled):
How did we get here? We saw the island from the shore and we thought we'd check it out.

OLD MAN:
The mist--it was gone?

DARION:
Oh yeah, there was a little mist. But it was no big deal, really.

OLD WOMAN (to the old man):

Lionel...it's happening!

He bows his head grimly.

GABRIELLE (confused):

What's happening?

OLD WOMAN:

This is Avalon, the Isle of Mists. It is an enchanted place--it's supposed to be invisible to anyone who lives beyond its shores. No outsider has set foot here for many, many years.

DARION (excited):

Enchanted! Who enchanted it?

LIONEL:

We did, with the help of the spirits of the forest.

OLD WOMAN:

I am Cordeilla, Protectoress of the Isle of Mists.

LIONEL:

And I am Lionel, Protector of the Isle of Mists.

DARION:

Nice to meet you. I'm Darion. (points to Gabrielle) This is Gabrielle (points to Xena) and that's Xena.

LIONEL and CORDEILLA (in unison, flinching slightly):

Xena? The Warrior Princess?

XENA:

Yes, that's me.

LIONEL:

You were on this island thirty years ago, were you not?

Xena's face darkens; she darts a quick glance at Gabrielle, who flinches a little and looks down.

XENA:

Yes.

CORDEILLA:

It was then that we cast the enchantment. The land was threatened by a terrible danger from a strange god...they called him the Dark One.

Pan to Gabrielle, who gasps a little and lowers her eyes; Xena, a pained look on her face, squeezes Gabrielle's hand reassuringly.

LIONEL:

Our tribe lived on the coast in those days. When the Dark One threatened the land, Cordeilla and I

cast a spell and asked the spirits of the forest for protection, and we were granted this favor. (quick pan to Xena, who frowns slightly) Our village became an island invisible to outsiders' eyes--a magical place of harmony and peace where the land itself feeds and clothes us.

CORDEILLA:

But our existence depends on a herd of unicorns that live on the island. The magic is connected to the unicorns.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a curious look.

GABRIELLE:

Unicorns!

CORDEILLA:

The unicorn is a most unusual creature. It looks like a horse--only with a magical horn growing from its forehead. The unicorns are the only ones who can cross the boundaries between Avalon and the outside world--and it's only thanks to them that... (she pauses for a moment and looks at Lionel, then back to Xena and Gabrielle) ...the island continues to exist.

XENA:

And now, someone is killing the unicorns.

LIONEL (eyes widening in surprise):

How did you know?

GABRIELLE (sadly):

We found three of them dead--in the forest out there.

CORDEILLA (gasps):

Three! I wasn't sure how many it was. (shakes her head sadly) Lionel and I have a special bond to the unicorns--we can feel it when one of them dies. But we weren't sure how many died yesterday. Another was slain two days before. (looks imploringly at Xena) Xena, we have heard many tales of your heroic deeds. If anyone can help us, it's you.

GABRIELLE (troubled):

Why would anyone want to kill these unicorns?

LIONEL:

The horn of the unicorn possesses great powers.

DARION (curious):

Magical powers?

CORDEILLA:

Medicinal powers. It can ward off poisons, or purify polluted waters. It can cure people of many ailments. (she sighs) But if a unicorn's horn is severed, even if the animal is still alive, it will die very quickly.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange an uncertain look.

GABRIELLE (doubtfully):

So they can do a lot of good...

CORDEILLA:

It's true. At the cost of their lives--the lives of innocent, beautiful magical creatures.

LIONEL:

And at the cost of destroying this island.

CORDEILLA:

And not just that. If the unicorns die, the forest out there, the Brigantes forest, will start dying too.

GABRIELLE (gasps a little):

Dying! (turns to Xena) I told you something was happening to the forest! (to Lionel and Cordeilla) We saw some trees and flowers wilting out there... Xena, we have to help.

XENA (to Cordeilla and Lionel):

Any idea who could be doing this?

CORDEILLA (slowly shakes her head):

No. We don't have a clue.

XENA:

Maybe I do. (she takes something off her belt) We found this in the clearing near the dead unicorns.

CORDEILLA:

What is it?

XENA:

A pendant. (she holds out the pendant and hands it to Cordeilla)

CORDEILLA (examines the pendant, then gasps slightly):

It can't be!

LIONEL:

What?

CORDEILLA (shows him the pendant):

It was Isabella's.

GABRIELLE:

Who's Isabella?

CORDEILLA:

A young girl who came to Avalon fifteen summers ago. She was only five years old, and she told us that her parents had died of an illness and she had wandered away from her village. The unicorns found her wandering in the woods and brought her here. We took her in as one of our own, and she gave us great happiness and joy. She was such a perfect little girl. (she lowers her eyes for a moment) You see, as long as we live here on Avalon, we cannot have children of our own. It's the price we pay for the enchantment.

DARION (scrunches up his face):

No kids? That's kinda sad...

LIONEL:

I can't believe that Isabella would do anything to harm the unicorns...

CORDEILLA:

She loved the unicorns--she loved to sit and watch them, she loved to play with them, and they loved her. Isabella lived with us for a year. Then one day, she went off riding on the back of one of the unicorns, and never came back. We think that she went outside Avalon. The entire island mourned her loss.

GABRIELLE:

And you're sure this is her pendant?

CORDEILLA:

Yes, it's definitely her pendant. But--

XENA (abruptly):

All right. We're heading back to Brigantes and we'll look into this.

LIONEL (hopeful):

You'll help us, then?

XENA (coldly):

Let me get back to you on that.

CORDEILLA (looks at her intently):

Would you like to see the unicorns?

DARION (claps his hands, excited):

Yes! (turns to Xena, pleading) Please, please let's see the unicorns!

Xena looks uncertain.

GABRIELLE (turns to Xena):

Surely there's no harm in seeing the unicorns?

XENA (sighs):

All right.

CORDEILLA:

Follow us. We'll take you to their watering place.

Lionel and Cordeilla turn and start to walk, leaning on their staffs. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion follow them, Xena and Gabrielle leading their horses.

CUT TO

Lionel and Cordeilla, with Xena, Gabrielle and Darion behind them, walk through a forest and approach an opening in the trees. The air is filled with the buzz of insects and the singing of birds. A

wide shot of a beautiful clearing with a crystal-clear lake underneath a rock from which a waterfall comes down, sparkling a bright silver in the sun. The lake is surrounded by rose bushes with roses of various colors, as well as other lush flowers. Finally, we see the unicorns. They are snow white, with cream-colored manes and golden hooves and horns. There are about thirty of them--some drinking, some grazing near the lake, some frolicking nearby.

DARION:

Wow! They're amazing! Can I ride one?

XENA (smiles a little):

I don't think so.

GABRIELLE:

I can see why the people here are so passionate about protecting these creatures. They really are beautiful.

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion watch the unicorns--Darion with giddy excitement, Gabrielle with a dreamy smile, Xena with a small, rather tense, pensive smile on her face, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Day. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion ride through the forest.

DARION:

So where are we going now?

XENA:

Back to the clearing where we found those unicorns. (looks at Darion, concerned) You can stay behind--you don't have to look at them again.

DARION (puts on a brave face):

I can handle it.

Gabrielle pats him on the shoulder.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion approach the clearing. As they look through the branches, Darion gasps and points at something off-camera.

GABRIELLE:

Shh...

Pan to Isabella, who stands near the bodies of the unicorns, digging the ground with a shovel. A roan horse grazes nearby.

Xena rides ahead at a fast trot. Gabrielle follows her. Hearing the sound, Isabella flinches and turns around quickly. There is plain relief in her face at the sight of Xena and Gabrielle, though a little wariness comes back into her look a moment later.

ISABELLA:

Who are you?

XENA:

I could ask you the same question. (she rides up close to Isabella and stops, then takes the pendant off her belt and holds it up) You haven't lost anything around here, by any chance?

With a small cry, Isabella reaches up for the pendant but Xena snatches her hand away.

XENA:

Not so fast. First, you're going to tell us a few things about the unicorns.

Isabella watches her for a moment, then her face crumples as she drops the shovel.

ISABELLA (almost tearful):

I didn't want to do it...I love the unicorns.

GABRIELLE:

That's what Lionel and Cordeilla told us.

ISABELLA (looks up sharply):

You've seen Lionel and Cordeilla? You've been to Avalon?

DARION:

Yeah, we have. It's a really cool place. These huts they have are just amazing--

ISABELLA (interrupts):

That's impossible! No one can get in from the outside--except... (her voice breaks off)

XENA:

Except if they ride a unicorn? (Isabella nods brokenly.) Well, I'm not sure how, but we got a ticket in. I suspect it has something to do with the unicorns being killed.

Isabella shudders.

GABRIELLE (gently):

Tell us what you know about that.

ISABELLA (sighs):

It's my adoptive father, King Meliadus. After I left Avalon, he and his men found me in the woods, and he adopted me. He's always been good to me...but now, he's been forcing me to bring his men to this forest and to lure the unicorns to be killed. (pauses) I'm so sorry. It's my fault...

XENA:

Why does he want to kill the unicorns?

ISABELLA:

He says it's for the good of the people...but I think that mostly, he's just in this to make money. (bitterly) He isn't wasting any time, either. Two of his advisors are already going out on the city square today to sell ground unicorn horn to people. It's the power, too...he believes that if he has the horns with their medicinal powers, he can become the most powerful king in Britannia--by deciding which kingdoms will get access to the horn.

GABRIELLE:

We need to stop him, then.

XENA (with a steely look):

Do we? (off Gabrielle's and Isabella's startled looks) If these horns have such power to cure, should it be up to us to deny them to people? So the king wants to make money by selling them. Does it matter what his motives are, as long as he ends up doing something good?

GABRIELLE:

But Lionel and Cordeilla said Avalon would die if the unicorns were gone...

XENA (her face darkens):

And what if it did? Gabrielle--those people took refuge on their little enchanted island to hide from Dahak... (quick pan to Gabrielle, who flinches; Xena stumbles, looking guilty) All they wanted was to wait out the danger--let everyone else do something about it.

GABRIELLE (softly):

But look at the wonderful world they've built...so peaceful and beautiful and full of harmony-- (off Xena's unconvinced look) And this forest--didn't they say it would start dying too if the unicorns died?

XENA (skeptical):

That's what they said.

GABRIELLE (points to a withering branch with wilting leaves):

Look at this! What happens if the forest dies, Xena? What about all the plants in these woods that have medicinal properties? What about all the people who depend on the forest for their livelihood?

ISABELLA (imploringly):

Please...I don't know who you are, but if you can do something to save the unicorns, please do it. The king... (lowers her eyes) ...my father is sending out his men today for another hunt, and he wants me to help them again. I don't think I can bear it if any more of these poor animals die because of me...

XENA (thinks a moment, then nods grimly):

All right, we'll do it. (to Isabella, who looks up joyfully) Don't start thanking us yet. You said you lured the unicorns. Where?

ISABELLA:

There's a beach not far from here--the one where the crossing to Avalon is...

XENA:

When is the hunt?

ISABELLA:

Five hours after noon.

XENA:

We'll be there, don't worry.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, wait. So we'll stop the king's men from killing the unicorns for now. But what happens when we leave this kingdom?

XENA (thoughtfully):

Good point.

GABRIELLE (thinks a moment, then her face lights up):

Hey--what if we do something to make sure that no one wants to buy the unicorn horns anymore?

XENA (frowns):

What are you talking about?

GABRIELLE (wrinkles her nose, thinking hard):

Maybe start a rumor that it has side effects of some kind...

DARION:

Like what? (thinks, then grins) You use it and you grow a horn on your forehead!

XENA:

A little too melodramatic.

GABRIELLE (smirks):

Leave it to me, Xena. I'll think of something. (to Darion) Maybe you can help me out, huh? What do you say?

DARION (his face lighting up):

I get to help? That's really cool!

XENA:

Fine. Why don't you and Darion ride back to town with Isabella, and I'll stay here and wait for the hunt.

GABRIELLE (her smile turns to a frown):

And you're going to fight alone?

XENA (haughtily):

Gabrielle, I think I can handle a few unicorn hunters.

ISABELLA (nervously):

I should be going back to the palace or they'll miss me... (nods toward the unicorns) Would you help me bury them? I don't want to leave them like this...

GABRIELLE (smiles gently and puts a hand on her arm):

Sure.

CUT TO

The town square in Eborac. One of King Meliadus' counselors, a portly man in rich clothes, stands on a platform before an assembled crowd.

COUNSELOR:

Not only can the horn of the unicorn cure all those illnesses, it is also an antidote to nearly every poison known to man! (gasps in the crowd) Ten gold pieces for a mere pinch of magical horn ground to powder (he holds up a tiny satchel) may seem like a lot, but trust me, my good people, it's worth it.

As he speaks, the camera starts to pan over the crowd and finally zooms in on Gabrielle, dressed in an ordinary-looking brownish-green dress with a kerchief covering her head, and with Darion standing at her side.

GABRIELLE (sighs and mutters, as if to herself):

It's too bad about the side effects.

A man standing next to her--tall and imposing-looking, with grayish blond hair and a beard--turns and gives her a wary look.

MAN #1:

Side effects?

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Yes, the gods preserve you. You see, my husband tried powdered horn of unicorn as a cure for an old battle wound that left him with a bad limp.

MAN #2 (young and dark-haired, turns to Gabrielle):

And what happened?

GABRIELLE (wistfully):

Oh, he was cured all right. To watch him walk about, you'd never know he's been wounded at all.

DARION:

My uncle's the fastest runner in the whole town!

MAN #1:

Then what's the problem?

GABRIELLE (looks nervously at Darion, then coughs and smiles coyly, batting her eyelashes):

Oh...let's just say that ever since then, I haven't been able to enjoy my husband's-- (gives Darion another nervous look) --companionship.

DARION (looks puzzled):

That's not true. Uncle spends almost every evening at home.

GABRIELLE (pats him on the head):

Hush, sweetie. Some day you'll be old enough to understand.

MAN #2 (shocked):

You mean, he hasn't been able to--perform?

DARION (puzzled):

Perform what? (thinks for a moment) My uncle can dance really well! Isn't that true, Auntie Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE (gives him a nervous look):

Yes, of course, sweetie. (to the two men and several other people, men and women, who have been listening curiously) This is my nephew. He's like a son to me. And thank the gods for him-- because unless a miracle happens (she scrunches up her face, as if about to cry) my husband and I are not going to have any kids of our own...

The people standing around them start eyeing each other nervously. The men, in particular, look sickened. They start whispering to others.

WOMAN #1 (a tall blonde of about thirty):

But how do you know it was because of the unicorn's horn?

GABRIELLE (indignantly):

I'll say! Let me tell you--before he took the stuff, he may have had a bad leg but there was nothing wrong with the rest of him. (sighs) Besides, the exact same thing happened to my neighbor Janell and her husband. He took the powder because he was nearly blind in one eye. Well, I'll tell you one thing...his eyesight has improved, but he isn't taking much pleasure in what he sees, the poor man, and neither is his wife.

The whispers grow louder, rising to an audible murmur in which voices can be heard:

-- What?

-- I knew it sounded too good to be true!

-- Better stay away from the stuff!

-- But they say it can cure the deadliest illnesses!

-- Yeah, and by the time you're done with the cure you wish you were dead!

The camera pans back to the counselor on the platform and his voice, heard in the background before, is heard at full volume again.

COUNSELOR:

And I haven't told you the best thing yet. For all you men out there... (grins salaciously) ...and of course the ladies will want to hear this too...the unicorn's horn does wonders for a man's virility!

The camera pans to the crowd as a loud indignant murmur erupts.

WOMAN #2 (middle-aged):

Yeah, we've heard all about these wonders!

MAN #3 (shakes his fist at the counselor):

Lies, all lies!

Other voices:

-- We weren't born yesterday!

-- Come on, we've heard enough!

-- Let's get out of here!

The crowd starts to disperse as the counselor looks on in dismay.

COUNSELOR:

Wait! Where are you going? I was getting to the best part!

Close-up on Gabrielle as she smirks in triumph.

CUT TO

The grove near the beach. Argo is grazing, tethered to a tree. The trees rustle and Xena appears, sword in hand, looking around her thoughtfully. She has obviously been surveying the terrain in preparation for the fight.

XENA (comes up to Argo pats her on the neck):

What do you think, Argo? If they come from the direction of the island, we can come out on the beach right there (points to an opening in the trees) and cut them off. Then-- (she pauses suddenly; her eyes widen slightly as she clearly senses Ares' presence. She sounds pleased and a little wary at the same time as she speaks.) Ares.

There is a faint whooshing sound. The camera pans down to Xena's waist as Ares' gauntleted arm comes into view, encircling it; then it pulls back to show Ares standing behind Xena and kissing her shoulder. Argo gives an alarmed neigh but then calms down. Xena sighs and closes her eyes for a moment, throwing her head back in pleasure.

ARES (suavely):

Busy?

XENA (opens her eyes):

As a matter of fact--

ARES (sighs in exasperation):

Of course.

XENA (turns to him and smiles):

I was going to say, not for another hour.

ARES:

Really. I wonder how a Warrior Princess and a God of War can spend an hour in the woods when there's nothing to do...

XENA (teasingly):

Talking strategy?

ARES:

Of course. Why didn't I think of that.

They kiss, their kiss slowly growing deeper and more passionate as Xena winds her arms around Ares' neck and he holds her close.

CUT TO

Isabella's chamber. The door swings open; Isabella, who is seated in an armchair reading a scroll, looks up anxiously. Meliadus stands in the doorway.

MELIADUS:

Isabella, it's time for the hunt again. Are you ready?

ISABELLA (rises and looks at him sadly):

Yes, father.

CUT TO

The grove. The camera pans over Argo, then down to the ground and over Xena's breastplate and boots lying on the grass, and then over to Xena and Ares. Ares, his vest and gauntlets off, is reclining against a tree; Xena is leaning back against his chest, her eyes closed, wearing only her tunic. He is stroking her hair.

ARES:

So, what's the job this time?

XENA:

Saving some unicorns from a greedy king.

ARES (incredulous):

Unicorns. You've expanded into animal protection?

XENA (chuckles):

They're not just animals.

ARES (mockingly):

Oh, that's right. They're the stuff of legend and song and poetry. Why do I have a hunch that Gabrielle has a hand in this project?

XENA:

The unicorns protect the forest, Ares. (sighs) And--other things.

ARES (runs his fingertips along her cheek, making her shiver slightly):

So it's all about the Greater Good.

XENA (a pensive look on her face):

The Greater Good... (she looks up at the position of the sun; then, her expression turns businesslike) Time to get ready for work.

She turns to Ares and gives him a quick kiss; as she is about to pull away, Ares draws her closer and prolongs the kiss.

CUT TO

A grassy section of the beach. The sea is shrouded in mist, which has thickened again. Isabella stands by the water's edge, still wearing the same blue-green dress as before. Her hair is flapping in the wind; her face looks anguished. She is holding out her hands toward the sea.

Something can be seen moving inside the mist. We see the glimpse of a golden horn, and then golden hooves. The water can be heard splashing. Finally, a unicorn emerges from the mist, trotting toward Isabella as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The unicorn comes up to Isabella, bows its head and nuzzles her. With tears in her eyes, she strokes its head and its mane, and touches its horn.

ISABELLA (whispers):
Run...save yourself...

Four more unicorns emerge from the mist, heading toward her.

ISABELLA (looks at them wistfully):
I hope Xena can save you...

Loud hoof beats can be heard coming from the direction of the trees. As the unicorns look up in alarm, menacing shouts and hoots are heard. Isabella stands back, tears rolling down her cheek, hands joined at her chest as if in prayer.

Three hunters come into view, riding toward the unicorns. The animals neigh in fright and dart toward the water but the hunters cut off their escape and pursue them down the beach.

Close-up on Isabella's tearful face.

CUT TO

Further down the beach. The unicorns are galloping fast in a desperate attempt to evade their pursuers.

Xena's battle cry comes ringing from the woods, piercing the air. The hunters turn, startled.

HUNTER #1 (from the teaser):
What was that?

HUNTER #2:
Never mind! I got him!

He steadies his bow, preparing to shoot an arrow at one of the unicorns.

Quick sequence of shots:

- * Xena comes galloping out of the woods, a look of intense focus on her face;
- * The arrow leaves the bow and flies toward the unicorns;
- * One of the unicorns neighs in terror;
- * A close-up of Xena's hand shooting out to catch the arrow;
- * The hunters staring in shock;

Xena turning toward them with a gleeful grin.

XENA:

Didn't anyone tell you poaching was illegal?

HUNTER #1:

Not if you're working for the king. I suggest you stay out of our way.

XENA:

You know, people keep telling me that (with a mock frown) but I never listen.

HUNTER #2:

Too bad for you.

XENA:

No. (grins) Too bad for them.

The men charge her, drawing their swords. Xena throws her chakram, knocking the swords from the hands of two of them; disoriented, the men look around and then dismount to pick up their swords while Xena catches the chakram just in time to parry the sword of Hunter #1. They spar briefly but he is clearly no match for her. With a deft movement, she slices at the harness of his horse and the man's saddle slides down, leaving him hanging upside down with one foot caught in the stirrup.

Xena dismounts, grinning.

Close-up of Xena's face from below, as seen by the man dangling from his saddle.

XENA:

You're still alive. I suggest you quit while you're ahead.

She knocks him out with a punch, then cuts him loose. The other two men, who have retrieved their swords, run up to attack her but she quickly parries their blows.

CUT TO

Further down the beach. As the unicorns gallop away, four more hunters, Oswald among them, charge out of the woods, cutting off their path.

CUT TO

Xena makes short work of the two men attacking her; one is knocked out when she hits him on the head with the broadside of her sword, while the other is punched in the face and flies back, landing hard on his back.

A loud, terrified neigh is heard off-camera. Xena whips around and sees one of the unicorns being lassoed in the distance. With a furious look on her face, she leaps in the saddle.

The camera zooms in on the unicorn; the man who has lassoed him is Oswald, who has dismounted and is prepared to strike the unicorn down. The other three hunters are closing in on the unicorns as well.

Ares strolls out of the woods, rather casually twirling his sword.

OSWALD (glares at him):
What do *you* want?

ARES (nonchalant):
Just to help out an old friend.

He comes closer and swings his sword, cutting the rope of the lasso. Neighing, the unicorn shakes itself and gets up. Oswald glares at Ares.

OSWALD:
The king will hear about this!

ARES (smirks):
I outrank him.

He spars with Oswald, easily parrying his blows and attacking; just as Xena approaches, he flips in the air and kicks Oswald down, knocking him out. The camera pans quickly to one of the hunters, who is about to strike down a unicorn, and to another hunter who is about to make a kill as well. Xena, who is catching up, throws her chakram at one of the hunters while Ares simultaneously throws his sword at the other. Xena's chakram knocks the sword from the hunter's hand; Ares' sword goes through the other hunter, killing him. The remaining hunter looks from Xena to Ares and back, then gallops away at breakneck speed.

Xena and Ares look at each other, smiling almost imperceptibly. It is clear that at that moment they feel their bond as warriors. Ares comes up to Xena and puts his hand on her knee; she puts her hand over his.

XENA (looks at the dead hunter's body, the small smile fading from her face):
You didn't have to kill him...

ARES (rolls his eyes):
You're welcome.

XENA (sighs, her face softening, and dismounts to stand face to face with Ares):
Ares...thank you for helping me out.

ARES (shrugs):
No big deal. I guess someone had to fill in as your sidekick.

Xena chuckles. They are distracted by the sound of neighing. As they turn, they see the four unicorns standing by the water's edge, the water lapping at their golden hooves, their horns glistening in the sun, the breeze stirring their cream-colored manes.

Isabella comes running, slightly out of breath.

ISABELLA (to Xena):
You saved them!

She runs up to the unicorns. Xena watches, obviously moved, as Isabella strokes their muzzles and their manes and they nuzzle her. Then, after a few moments, the unicorns turn and trot off into the mist. Isabella watches them, smiling through tears.

XENA (quietly):
They *are* beautiful.

ISABELLA (comes up to Xena):
I don't know how to thank you... (looks at Ares) You and your friend--

XENA:
Don't thank me yet. They may come back. We have to find out if Gabrielle's part of the plan has worked.

GABRIELLE (off-camera):
Without a hitch!

Xena turns around, smiling. Gabrielle has just ridden out of the grove onto the beach; Darion is in the saddle with her.

DARION (grins broadly):
Ares!

He scrambles down to the ground and runs toward Ares, who looks visibly embarrassed.

GABRIELLE (also dismounts, smirking):
After what happened in the city square today, I don't think too many people in Eborac will be in the market for unicorn horns.

ISABELLA:
But what about other cities?

GABRIELLE:
Don't worry, we'll get there too. But just in case, if you have a few maidservants you can trust--you should send them out to other cities and have them spread the rumors. (grins mischievously) I'll tell you exactly what they have to say. Believe me, it'll work.

DARION (turns to her):
Hey, Gabrielle! You still haven't explained that whole thing to me. (Gabrielle looks down, blushing furiously)

XENA:
Explained what?

DARION:
She told me that if I played along with everything she said, she'd tell me what it was all about. The

story she told about what happened to her husband after he took some unicorn horn powder. All the people who were there looked like it really scared them. (thinks about it for a moment) Especially the men. But I didn't get it and she still hasn't told me.

XENA (glances mischievously at Gabrielle):
Really. I want to hear this story, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (intensely uncomfortable):
Oh, I'll explain it to him. I guess it's time somebody told Darion about the facts of life...

ARES:
The facts of life? Like what, "Kill them before they kill you?"

GABRIELLE (glares at him):
No.

ARES:
Oh, you mean *those* facts of life! Come on, kid, I'll--

GABRIELLE (growls):
Don't you *dare*!

Ares chuckles.

XENA:
All right, time to get out of here. (to Isabella) We'll take you back to town.

ISABELLA (stares intently into the mist):
Wait...I think the unicorns are coming back!

DARION (excited):
Yea!

Movement can be seen inside the mist; finally, a unicorn becomes visible, with Cordeilla seated astride it. The unicorn stops so that it and its rider are still within the veil of mist.

GABRIELLE (gasps):
Cordeilla!

ISABELLA (cries out):
Cordeilla! (she runs into the water and toward Cordeilla, oblivious to the hem of her dress getting soaked in the surf)

CORDEILLA (reaches toward Isabella):
Hello, child. It's good to see you again. We've missed you.

ISABELLA (ashamed):
You wouldn't be glad to see me if you knew what I've done...I helped lure the unicorns to be killed.

CORDEILLA (with deep sadness):
Why?

GABRIELLE:

It wasn't her fault, Cordeilla. Her adoptive father, King Meliadus, forced her to do it.

ISABELLA:

He made me feel so guilty because the unicorn's horn can cure diseases--like the one that killed my real parents... Can you ever forgive me?

CORDEILLA (smiles):

Of course, child. (turns to Xena and Gabrielle) On behalf of all of Avalon, I wanted to thank you. You saved the unicorns. You saved the forest, and you saved Avalon.

DARION (curious):

What would have happened to Avalon if the unicorns had been killed?

CORDEILLA (ponders this a moment, as if deciding whether to tell the truth and finally taking the plunge):

It would have floated back to shore and become part of the land again. Its magic would have been lost.

GABRIELLE (bewildered):

You mean, you would have been reunited with the rest of humanity?

CORDEILLA:

That's right.

GABRIELLE (glances back at Xena, who stares at Cordeilla, her face grim and set):

And you didn't want that?

CORDEILLA (sounds almost apologetic):

We're used to the lives we lead. Most of us want things to stay the way they are.

XENA:

And what happens now?

CORDEILLA (calmly):

When the enchantment was cast, one of its conditions was that if Avalon remained an island in the mists for thirty summers, it would remain that way forever and drift out to sea. That day is almost here.

GABRIELLE:

But you said you couldn't have any children as long as you lived on Avalon. That means you will die out.

CORDEILLA:

As long as we stay on the island, we have the gift of great longevity. We hardly age; my hair was already white like this, and my skin wrinkled like this, when Avalon was created. We will go on for hundreds of years. (nods to Xena and Gabrielle) Thanks to you. Believe me, you did the right thing. (to Isabella) Do you want to come back with me?

GABRIELLE:

Isabe--

XENA (puts a warning hand on Gabrielle's arm):

Let *her* choose.

There is silence as Isabella ponders the offer, and then finally shakes her head.

ISABELLA:

I'll always miss you, and Lionel, and the other people of Avalon... (her voice drops) ...and the unicorns. But my place is here.

CORDEILLA (nods wistfully):

Good-bye, child. Have a good life.

She turns around and rides off slowly, disappearing into the mist. The camera lingers on Xena, Gabrielle, Ares, Darion and Isabella as they stare after her.

CUT TO

A path in the woods. Gabrielle, Darion and Isabella are riding ahead; Xena is walking some distance behind them, leading Argo, with Ares at her side.

ARES:

We make a good team, don't we?

XENA (thoughtfully):

I guess we do. (glances at him, struck by a sudden thought) You didn't use your powers.

ARES (shrugs):

Where's the fun in that? Besides, we're not really supposed to use our powers on other gods' turf.

XENA (glances at him):

What is that, part of the Olympian rulebook?

ARES:

Nah. More of a gentleman's agreement. (off her amused look) I know, I know. You never would have figured me for a gentleman.

XENA:

Actually, that's not what I was going to say.

ARES:

Then what?

XENA (playfully):

Just that maybe one of these days, we should go and have an adventure together on some other god's turf.

ARES (gives her a long stare, then smiles slyly as he catches her meaning):

I'll hold you to that.

He vanishes abruptly. Xena stands still for a moment, staring at the spot where he vanished, then shakes her head with a small smile and walks on.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion walking through the streets of Eborac.

GABRIELLE (thoughtfully):

So the island wasn't going to die...it was going to rejoin the rest of humanity.

XENA:

I thought it might be something like this.

GABRIELLE (glances at her, surprised):

You did? Why?

XENA:

Remember when three of the unicorns were killed? The mist around Avalon thinned and we were able to get through to the island.

DARION:

Right, I remember that!

XENA:

And when we got there, Lionel and Cordeilla were really worried that the mist was gone.

GABRIELLE (awed):

That's true... (glances at Xena) So why did you decide to help them? Don't tell me you got all sentimental about unicorns.

XENA (smiles rather dreamily):

They are incredible, actually... (tosses her head as if to snap out of it) Lots of reasons. The whole forest might have died if the unicorns had been killed, and who knows how many people depend on that forest for their livelihood. Besides, the king was only in this for himself. The unicorn's horn could have given him a lot of power. Who knows how he would have used it.

GABRIELLE (thoughtfully):

And the people of Avalon...

XENA (shrugs):

Maybe it's justice for them, too. Thirty years ago, they ran from Dahak instead of standing up and fighting with the rest of humanity. Now they'll remain separate forever.

GABRIELLE:

They built a beautiful world...

XENA:

A useless world. No one except them will ever see it again. No one from outside will be able to get in, and they won't have any children. (after a thoughtful pause, she glances at Gabrielle and grins) Speaking of which, you were going to tell Darion about the--

DARION (pointing):

Gabrielle, *look!*

Xena and Gabrielle turn. The camera pans to a vendor's stall where, among other trinkets, there are many figurines of unicorns.

DARION:

Look at those unicorns! They look so--*real!* (runs up to the stall to look at the unicorns, then turns back to Xena and Gabrielle imploringly) Can I have one, please? Pretty please?

Xena and Gabrielle start to walk toward the vendors' stall; their voices begin to fade as the camera pulls back.

GABRIELLE (sighs with obvious relief):

Oh all right. But it's the last thing we're buying...

XENA (finishes wryly):

...at least while we're here in Britannia.

FADE OUT

THE END

[The unicorn's reputation was damaged during the production of this motion picture.]